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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the arguments for and against inclusion of advertising art in art education programs, and presents a case for the educational benefits of critically examining advertising art based on museum masterpieces. A search for examples of fine art masterpieces used in advertising art examined which masterpieces are commonly used in marketing goods and services, how advertising ideas are merged with master artwork, and how effective strategies related to masterpieces can be implemented in teaching. The identified borrowed masterpieces were of interest to a general audience, were accessible in terms of having recognizable content, and were generally portraits or representations of the human figure. The advertised products and services were very diverse. Potential criticisms of the alteration of masterpieces in advertising and the attention to this practice in the classroom include the notions that masterpieces are diminished by their use in advertising and that students would be taught to disrespect their artistic heritage. On the other hand, viewing familiar art presented in new creative ways may spark new appreciation of their aesthetic power. These masterpieces are part of everyone's heritage and open to reinterpretation, and attention to the advertising practices in the classroom may capture student interest and motivate learning and critical analysis. Eight related educational strategies and class activities are suggested. (SV)

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ED 442 615

Sacred and the Profane in Advertising Art

Bill Zuk and Robert Dalton

Advertising art is sometimes referred to as the lowest of art forms, yet it seems to have considerable impact on student consumers. This paper examines the arguments for and against inclusion of advertising art in art programs. It presents a case for the educational benefits of investigating and critically examining advertising art based on museum masterpieces.

Introduction

For many art educators there exists an uneasy feeling about the relationship between advertising art and museum masterpieces. Whether we know it or not, all of us have probably seen artwork by famous artists adapted and incorporated into advertising. For example, Munch's *The Scream*, Rodin's *The Thinker*, and Botticelli's *Primavera*. Advertising art sometimes makes use of these fine art masterpieces to gain our attention, to entertain us with clever adaptations of familiar exemplars, to associate its goods and services with the values we attach to museum treasures, and to help us remember a product. Students need to be aware of the fact that the objectives of advertising artists and art educators differ. When students are introduced to fine art exemplars, considerable energy is invested in fostering respect and cultivating an appreciation for the complexity, subtlety, and timeless quality of great art. The possibility that advertising undermines our efforts and trivializes masterpieces is considered.

For art educators, advertising art can become part of the classroom curriculum. The popular arts embodied in magazines, comics, film, and other forms of mass media are seen as a logical starting place to engage students in the serious investigation and critical examination of art. One natural progression consists of moving though advertising "adaptations" to the original artwork that inspired it. A progression from advertising art to museum art can serve to build respect and establish links to historical traditions. Advertising's use of fine art exemplars acknowledges the power of the artwork and opens the door to meaningful discussions about the relationships between economics and art, high art and low art, and numerous issues of aesthetics.

This study began with a search for paired examples featuring "sacred" museum art masterpieces and "profane" alterations used for the purpose of advertising.

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The following questions guided the research: Which art masterpieces are commonly used in marketing goods and services? How are advertising ideas merged or joined with master artwork? How can effective strategies related to masterpieces be implemented in teaching?

Museum Exemplars and Advertising Art

There is a distinction to be made between influence and appropriation. Both fine and popular artists create their work in a context of knowledge about historical and contemporary art. The influence of traditions is pervasive, acknowledged by the artists themselves, and can often be detected by others. This study examines work that is appropriated and obviously borrowed and includes only minor changes, such as the introduction or addition of a product and/or a linguistic message. Any search for examples of fine art masterpieces used in advertising art will depend on familiarity with art history and ability to recognize the variations as they are presented in magazines and other popular art forms.

Advertisements are generally created for the public domain, so familiarity and recognition are a key to their effectiveness. As a result, advertising artists typically use a small set of exemplars that are likely to be recognized by non-experts. As little as possible is usually changed to capture the interest of viewers.

The search for primary examples of masterpiece ads was relatively easy. It was found that a larger number of the appropriated images used by advertisers involved masterpieces from the Italian Renaissance. The best known works of two famous artists, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, have been used repeatedly. Indeed, it would be possible to create an extensive exhibition of examples from popular media that have re-interpreted Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* or Michelangelo's *David*. A considerable number of advertising artworks have also used the French Impressionists and post-Impressionists such as Monet, Van Gogh, and Gauguin. Appropriation has generally followed the shifting centres of Western art, from Western Europe to America where American Regionalism gave a "home-grown" appeal to artists like Grant Wood and Pop Artists like Andy Warhol.

In every case, the borrowed masterpieces are of interest to a general audience and accessible in terms of having recognizable content. For instance, there is nothing more engaging than portraits and representations of the human figure. People are generally more favorably disposed to realism than abstraction. This disposition tends to eliminate subjects like landscape or still life, and art styles or movements like Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism. Although this limits

the field of choice considerably, it still leaves open the question of why some images have a certain power that makes them so compelling. Why has Grant Wood's *American Gothic* and August Rodin's *The Thinker* become so popular, while other impressive figurative works remain "unexploited?" This is an intriguing question and one that can lead to a productive discussion in the classroom.

While it is fairly easy to identify commonly used artworks, it was not possible to discover any limits to the range of advertised products and services that are joined to the exemplars. The exemplars seemed quite diverse and included such things as jewelry, cosmetics, bathroom fixtures, detergent, clothing, food, alcohol, paper plates, and airlines. For the advertising artist who is assigned the task of promoting a product, the decision as to which exemplar to adopt can be a very important one. Some combinations tend to be more advantageous, artistically and commercially, than others. "Mona Lisa" may be recast as a spokesperson holding almost any product in her hands. However, when she is holding a certain brand of pasta, the connections between Italy, tradition, and quality seem a more natural extension of the ideas and values an advertiser would choose to boost sales of the product. Much has been said about the enigmatic smile of Mona Lisa. When the teeth whitening product, Pearl Drops, was placed next to a close-up of the famous portrait, along with the caption *"It'll make you smile,"* the match seemed a natural and even memorable one (see Figure 1). Considering the fact that art conservators use chemicals to remove layers of soot and varnish in order to restore paintings to their original brilliance, the match seems even more appropriate.

Since paper plates are often used for large gatherings and picnics, the artist's decision to include Royal Chinet products in the gathering of elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen of Monet's famous painting "*Picnic*" seems an excellent choice. It is also possible for a "fit" to be too good. If the newly introduced product fits too well within the masterpiece, there is a chance that viewers may not even discover the addition or intended association. Text can sometimes be used to guide viewers and the Royal Chinet advertisement that appears in one collection carried the jingle —

"The Picnic" by Monet
"The Plates" by Chinet

Not all combinations of product and art are seemingly natural. Advertisers sometimes make their readers stretch their imagination or suspend disbelief in order to combine ideas that are quite distant and even irreverent. Courting controversy can gain attention and make a product memorable. The Kohler Company's ad for a toilet is a case in point. Using Michelangelo's Sistine

Chapel figure of God that shows a hand extended in the act of creating Adam, commercial artist Scott Seifort replaced the divine creation with the bathroom fixture depicted in Figure 2. At risk of offending Christians and art historians, the company saw the chance to elevate their product and make it memorable. The humble porcelain fixture is cast as a magnificent object — perfection itself.

In another example, Canadian Airlines placed an ad to encourage travelers to fly to Venice. This ad used an adaptation of Michelangelo's famous sculpture of David, regarded by many art historians as a symbol of the Renaissance and a work of surpassing beauty. The slogan, *"We bring Canada to the rest of the world"* was placed below the digitally altered photograph seen in Figure 3. Covering the genitals of the monumental marble figure is a maple leaf. Many people use airlines to travel to Europe and the artistic treasures of Italy are an important attraction. For this reason, it seems a natural advertising campaign. However, the decision to use a maple leaf is one that could create controversy. It may offend some Canadians who feel that our national symbol is dishonored by its use as a "fig leaf." Some viewers might be grateful to the company for concealing this portion of the human anatomy lest it be seen by children who are impressionable or may be confused by depictions of nudity in a family magazine. Still others may find a touch of humour in this subtle addition. For the sponsor of the ad, the use of the maple leaf helps viewers make a further connection between the attraction and where the airline can take us. The issues can be rather complex. Advertisers must consider the effect their ads will have on a broad spectrum of the viewing public.

Masterpieces are altered, but are they necessarily diminished by use in advertising art? Some would argue that certain art masterpieces have become so familiar that we no longer pay them the respect and attention they deserve. Familiarity may have dulled our sensitivity to their aesthetic power. However, by changing them in creative ways, we re-invest them with meaning and are drawn into examining and thinking about them in their new form. Others would add that these exemplars are part of our artistic heritage and they belong to us all. As such, we are free to re-interpret, comment about, and revitalize them in creative ways.

Is there a Place for Advertising Art in the Classroom?

By bringing museum masterpieces, in altered form, into the classroom are we teaching students to disrespect their artistic heritage? Do we risk turning great works into jokes? Not all art exemplars borrowed for use in advertising are meant to be humorous, but examples of this type can be used effectively to

capture student interest and motivate learning. For example, there are occasions where the masterpiece itself is a parody. Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein used sentimental romance comics as the inspiration for some of his large, museum canvases. Borrowing a technique from the printing press, he greatly magnified the dots of ink that make the colours in mass produced images. His work provided a fine commentary on the themes and styles of popular art. In what can be considered as a parody of parodies, advertisers for Sunlight dishwashing detergent created a Lichtenstein-esque ad in which a startled woman discovers "spots" on her glass crystal goblets. The soap opera story line is advanced by the speech balloon recording the woman's startled reaction, *"SPOTS! And Dave's boss is coming for dinner! How will I cope?!"* (see Figure 4). The Sunlight ad is a gentle spoof on modern art, and also a spoof on detergent commercials.

Many artists use humour as a means of making a serious point (Zuk & Dalton, 1998). There is a long and distinguished history of humour in its various forms in visual art such as satire and parody. Some of the masterpieces revered today were "irreverent" in their day. Viewers a century may miss the humour that was evident to those first viewers who understood the artistic and social context in which it was created, later. Some scholarly attention has been given to this topic. Roukes (1997) developed a typology of forms of visual humour that in many ways parallels literary forms.

Some will accept that acknowledging the humour intended by the master artist is one thing, but poking fun at masterpieces is another. Laughing with the artist is alright, but laughing at the artist is not. It can be argued that cultivating a respect for masterpieces should not be a primary objective in teaching. There is a role in public education for preserving tradition and sustaining our institutions, but our greater goal should be to teach students to become critical thinkers, to engage in dialogue, to write, and to create and communicate through visual art. This includes popular art as well as museum art, and contemporary art along with historical works. Klein (1999) reminds us that visual humour is a part of the world of children and cultivating this interest can help sustain their interest in artistic inquiry. Humour affords pleasure and this is a powerful motivating factor in engaging students in learning. This is not a release from the "serious" ideas of disciplined inquiry but may, in fact, be the very heart of the issue.

Thus far it has been assumed that students will be familiar with the masterpieces used in advertising art. This is not always so. Some students may be recent immigrants whose artistic heritage has no connection with Western traditions. There may also be students in our classrooms who, for reasons of economic disadvantage or for other reasons, have not encountered the exemplars in

question. This raises an interesting question. If these students meet the adaptation before being introduced to the exemplar, will their experience of it be different? Will, for example, the original *Mona Lisa* appear as a "knock-off" or a pale imitation of the Pearl Drops ad discussed previously? Or will the ad stimulate interest in meeting the "celebrity" who started it all? The authors believe the latter to be the case. The question is one that would require research in order to gain a definitive answer, but this view has support from other scholars. Pariser (1988) addressed a similar issue with respect to children's responses to another popular art form. Pariser admitted that young children can be very rigid in believing that the first version they are exposed to is the right version and all others are poor copies. However, he also asserted that the mark of a successful work is one that the audience feels can speak to our condition.

Educational Applications and Activities for Students

Using advertising art based on museum masterpieces can serve as an important means of bridging the world of students and the world of teachers, of connecting the familiar world of popular art with the less familiar world of high art. For some readers, compelling as this argument may seem, the most persuasive arguments for inviting advertising art into their classrooms comes from the value that can be abstracted from the suggested learning activities. When promising projects are recommended, the educational opportunities become evident. What follows is a diverse list of possible teaching recommendations for exploring and critically examining advertising art:

- Investigate some of the great masterpieces of modern art. Select one example and use your imagination to alter it in an art project by adding a product or service that this work would seem to support. Use humour to dramatize the product or an exaggeration to inflate reality. For younger students a large-scale art poster could be used and students could draw the product of their choice, cut it out, and temporarily affix it to the poster for discussion.
- Begin with a product or service, in much the same way as an advertising agency might, and identify a masterpiece that could be used to promote it. Create drawings of the original that explore various promotion possibilities. For increased effectiveness, suggest adding collaged images from art calendars, magazine pictures, or scanned images from a computer.
- Invite an advertising artist or art director of an ad agency to discuss how effective ads are made. Pose questions about

least and most successful ad campaigns and try to illustrate each extreme.

- Find television commercials that make use of art masterpieces. Sometimes these can be found as storyboards in *Graphis* publications that acknowledge excellence in graphic design and advertising art. Consider how the use of time and motion in a medium like television affects the representation of the masterpiece and the product. Discuss the effectiveness of the same ads found in magazines. Illustrate key ideas of the discussion.
- Study the campaigns of Absolut Vodka (Lewis, 1996) and other companies that have made it a trademark approach to use masterpieces in advertising or examine anti ads in *Ad Busters*, a Vancouver based publication that takes an irreverent approach to advertising. Create an anti ad.
- The Sunlight advertisement in Figure 4 uses the distinctive style of Lichtenstein rather than making minor modifications to a single work. This would distinguish it as an example of influence rather than appropriation. Find other examples of influence. (This may require a familiarity with artists' styles such as Mondrian's divided design areas, Picasso's cubist renditions, and Seurat's pointillist applications).
- As was evident in the Canadian Airlines ad in Figure 3, there are often issues and perspectives that are complex and interwoven. Choose an ad that uses a masterpiece and critically examine it using a process of analysis, interpretation, and judgement. For example, a Marxist perspective might examine the underlying message about wealth, social status, and consumerism; a feminist perspective might interpret it in terms of its depiction of women; a multicultural approach could take a critical look at how the ad is received by members of minority groups. Other ideas may be suggested by the particular artwork chosen. Organize a debate or discussion with differing points of view. Attempt to illustrate different points of view.
- The critical analysis of advertising images involves considering the complex interactions between masterpiece and product and between text and image. Develop ways of judging the quality of advertising images based on the depiction of the product and the linguistic message. Select several ads and form a judge's panel to determine which are most persuasive, memorable, and artistically superior.

In summary, knowledge about art can be acquired through studio activities that turn a fine art masterpiece into an ad, or begin with a product and find a suitable exemplar to support it. Insight can be gained to the unique challenges of advertising art by examining the industry, its strategies and campaigns in print as well as electronic media. Linkage between fine art and advertising art can also be explored through investigating the topics of appropriation and influence. Students should be drawn into critical analysis and judgement at every opportunity. Advertising art has enormous potential as a field of inquiry that can be both rigorous and enjoyable. It is accessible and therefore has relevance.

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Figure 1. Pearl Drops Ad

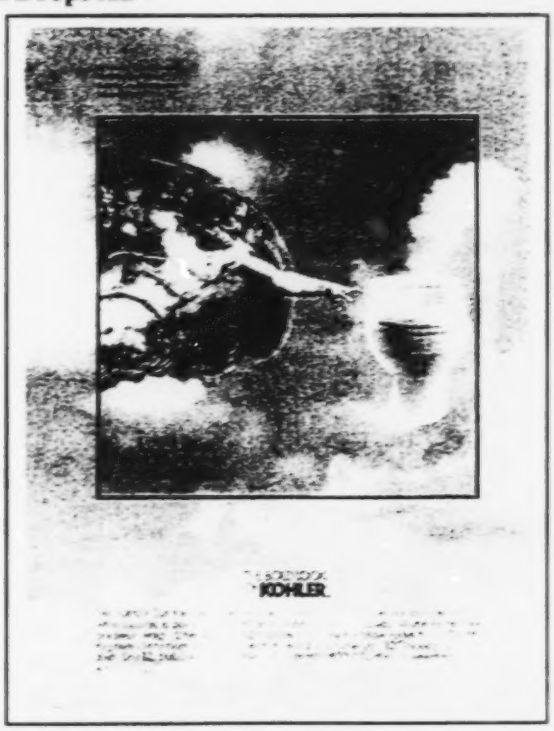

Figure 2. Kohler Toilet Ad

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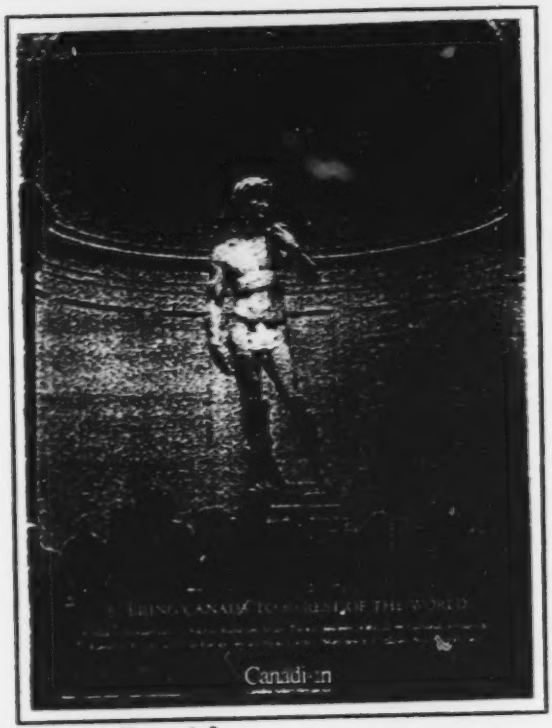

Figure 3. Canadian Airlines Ad

Figure 4. Sunlight Dishwashing Detergent Ad

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